

Volunteerism Initiative

As we approach the next millennium, volunteerism in our country faces serious external and internal challenges. Demographic shifts, changing lifestyles, a changing health care environment, and increasing competition for a shrinking volunteer pool that has less time are all factors that will have a tremendous impact on volunteerism in the near future.

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Volunteers are the essence of voluntary health agencies (VHAs). Without them, the programs and services offered by VHAs would be dramatically reduced. As such, the National Health Council seeks to address the issues affecting volunteerism through its new initiative, *Preparing for the Next Millennium: Strengthening Volunteer Engagement in Voluntary Health Agencies*. This initiative builds upon earlier Council efforts to ensure that an effective, satisfied volunteer workforce continues to conduct the mission-critical work of VHAs.

These efforts date back to 1994, when the National Health Council, the American Cancer Society, and the Points of Light Foundation formed a partnership to explore how VHAs handle and monitor volunteer involvement amid rapid social changes. Together, they commissioned research that identified volunteerism trends, challenges, and opportunities at the national and local levels. The Council is using the findings from this research project as the basis for its current initiative.

Through this initiative, the Council is seeking to strengthen volunteer engagement in VHAs by developing and managing a nationwide education campaign that will provide skills development, evaluation tools,

information, and a networking forum to relevant stakeholders. This initiative will include the following major elements:

- creating a program design team consisting of national and local volunteerism leaders from VHAs, National Health Council staff, and experts in the fields of volunteerism, program assessment, and training;
- producing an educational video that will address the key points of the above-mentioned study;
- developing a program assessment tool that national, state/regional and local offices can use to effectively assess how their volunteer programs measure against the best practices in the field;
- designing a training program that provides skills development in areas identified by both the study and the design team;
- rolling out the training through five regional training sessions;
- translating the training materials into stand-alone, train-the-trainer programs that can be adapted for field use around the country; and
- creating an online networking forum that links people responsible for managing the volunteer workforce to best practices, resources and experts in the field.

For more information about this initiative, contact Claudia Kuric, program director, at (703) 912-9573.